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Testimony before the Labor and Public Employees Committee

Tuesday, February 28th, 2012

2:00 PM in Room 1B of the LOB

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis and advocacy. I am here today to speak in support of **House Bill (HB) 5199 – *An act concerning discriminatory hiring practices and unemployed individuals.***

While the lack of employment has affected most residents in our state, the crisis has clearly had a more devastating impact on communities of color in our state. In 2010 the average unemployment rate in our state was 9.2 percent, for African-Americans it was almost twice that at 17.2 percent. In 2011 whereas the state average declined to 8.9

percent the unemployment rate for blacks increased to 18.3 percent.¹ This is consistent with unemployment trends across the nation. For any real job recovery to occur it must be balanced, inclusive and sustainable for all Connecticut's residents, regardless of an individual's race, occupation, background or education. We support the jobs bill passed in the summer. It was long overdue and is a step in the right direction. However we are asking the state to look deeper at current unemployment trends and invest and realign existing resources accordingly. This will ensure that job recovery efforts benefit all Connecticut residents and not a simple majority. There are a number of areas we urge you to look at:

The first is to expand the Jobs Funnel program to include job training; to prepare workers in manufacturing and new growth industries such as biotechnology etc. The long term unemployed need to be connected to new opportunities coming to our state such as the First Five initiative either through education and job training or direct recruitment initiatives.

Secondly the federally funded Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program is limited to providing education and job training only in occupations requiring certification and licensure, what is commonly referred to as low skilled, low paying jobs. This is definitely needed however there is broad segment of the population who are unemployed with professional skills, who may simply need a couple of classes to upgrade their skill set. Unfortunately for this population segment their only recourse to pay for such a class or workshop, is to dip into bank accounts that have already been depleted from the economic recession. The state should appropriate a certain level of funding for job initiatives for this purpose.

African-Americans make up at least 42 percent of the prison population.² This higher than normal rate of incarceration means that many African-Americans especially men will experience barriers in securing sustainable employment especially in a tight job

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and detailed age, 2010 & 2011 annual averages p — continued*, <http://www.bls.gov/lau/ptable14full2010/2011.pdf>

² Department of Corrections, January 1st 2012 Statistics

market, where employers have more options in recruiting employees. There are efforts underway to hire veterans. While these efforts are laudable the state needs to focus on other pockets of the population facing employment barriers such as ex-offenders, the long term unemployed and the aging. These are groups that are more vulnerable to employment discrimination. As such there is a need for more employment specialists and support services to deal with these special need populations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.